

When Harry met sexism

Bidisha

- 1 **I**t's no revolutionary thing to honour JK Rowling, the brains behind wizard icon Harry Potter and now a globally respected philanthropist. Indeed, she's been invited to give Harvard's graduation day commencement address next month. It's a logical choice: Rowling's story is as epic as any fantasy novel and her lone rise to genius/mogul status suits Harvard's credo of individualistic excellence.
- 2 Or maybe she's just a pathetic waste of space. Writing in the university paper, the *Harvard Crimson*, a student, Adam Goldenberg, rips into Rowling as "a flash in the pan", "a petty pop culture personality" who "tricked parents into letting their kids read books filled with sex, murder, and homosexual role models". Furthermore, "writing bedtime stories is lame".
- 3 Goldenberg's attack isn't new. First came the academic Harold Bloom, mocking her style. Then the novelist AS Byatt jeered at the infantilism of adult Potter fans. Thus men and women united in putting a gifted woman in her place.
- 4 The issue doesn't stop with Rowling. It extends to all female fantasy writers, world-creators and myth-makers. According to the backlash, Rowling is swell for dim kiddies, along with Susan Cooper and Diana Wynne Jones (but none are as good as CS Lewis or Roald Dahl, of course), while Philip Pullman and Philip Reeve are worthy of adult analysis. Critics ignore the tough

heroines created by Tamora Pierce and Trudi Canavan, but acclaim Lewis Carroll's creepily pliable Alice.

- 5 A subtle mechanism is operating here, clanking into gear to restore the dominant man-worshipping default mode while reserving a few token high-priestess places for the ladies. In speculative fiction that would be Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood and Ursula K Le Guin, geniuses all. These women are the real deal, worshipped for their vision, philosophical trenchancy and pertinence. But apart from the hallowed three it's men-only when it comes to casual recommendations of mainstream books.
- 6 In terms of which books sell plentifully and are acclaimed among knowledgeable fans, speculative fiction is not male-dominated at all – quite the opposite. It is the critical establishment that marginalises women.
- 7 Readers who rave about the scope of *Lord of the Rings*, are simply unaware of the awesome complexity of Katharine Kerr's Deverry sequence of Celtic fantasy novels. They hail William Gibson's prescience, oblivious to Marge Piercy's prophetic sci-fi masterpieces *Body of Glass* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Liz Williams's intelligent, knotty novels like *Darkland*.
- 8 Speculative fiction – whether that is historical epic, space psychodrama or telepathic warrior quest – has always been about infinite possibilities. Why is it so hard to imagine a world that acknowledges the importance, multitude and sheer brilliance of its women writers?

The Guardian, 2008

Tekst 8 When Harry met sexism

- 2p **35** Geef van elk van de volgende citaten aan of dit wel of niet de mening van Bidisha, de schrijfster van het artikel, weergeeft.
- 1 "Rowling's story ... fantasy novel" (alinea 1)
 - 2 "Or maybe ... of space." (alinea 2)
 - 3 "(but none ... of course)" (alinea 4)
 - 4 "But apart ... mainstream books." (alinea 5)
- Noteer het nummer van elk citaat, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- "A subtle mechanism is operating here" (alinea 5)
- 1p **36** Welk effect op de publieke opinie wordt door middel van dit mechanisme beoogd?
- 1p **37** Which of the following is true of Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood and Ursula K Le Guin, according to Bidisha (paragraph 5)?
- A** They are among the few writers good enough to hold their own in a man's world.
 - B** They are exposed as caricatures of the male writers they imitate.
 - C** They are lavishly praised mainly to avoid the accusation of male chauvinism.
 - D** They are more talented and more imaginative than all other female writers.
 - E** They are the only women novelists that sell just as well as their male counterparts.
- "the critical establishment" (alinea 6)
- 2p **38** Schrijf de namen op van de twee mensen die in dit artikel tot deze groep worden gerekend.
- 1p **39** How can the last paragraph be characterised?
- A** It concludes the article with a touch of irony.
 - B** It expresses surprise at the vast reservoir of talented female writers.
 - C** It regrets that women novelists keep their talents too much to themselves.
 - D** It restates the main point made in the article in a rhetorical way.

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.